המרכז הבינלאומי
שם עולם
SHEM OLAM
מחברים את דור העתיד לשואה
טבת תשפ"ד
JANUARY 2024

Shem Olam Faith & the Holocaust Institute for Education, Documentation & Research

The words suffering, slaughter, starvation, hatred, loss of human dignity, and annihilation are all synonymous with the Holocaust.

But the Holocaust is also about the human response to adversity, values, maintaining human dignity, the human spirit, and faith...

This new vantage point is the key to understanding what happened in the ghettos and the death camps, to those who hid and those who resisted.

This perspective is the prism through which Jewish history will be understood in the coming decades and centuries.

It is a perspective that isn't limited to remembering what happened. It is also an important tool that enables us to identify values, spirit, and faith.

It is something that has been noticeably absent from scientific and academic research in the decades that followed the Holocaust.

For this reason, the Shem Olam International Institute is determined to use scientific and historical tools to study this area and uncover documents and previously unknown sources about the world of values, faith, and religious and spiritual life which shed light on the human response to adversity during the Holocaust. Shem Olam's research studies add a lot to the field of education, Holocaust studies, and Holocaust heritage bya placing the emphasis on the 'shem olam', the eternal legacy of vast numbers of Jews who faced the most inhumane reality and grappled with darkness in the shadow of death in a cruel and heartless world.

To this end, the Shem Olam International Institute established three different departments: the education department, the documentation department, and the research department to realize this multifaceted goal.

News & updates

1

1

INCREASED PROGRAMMING FOR PRE-MILITARY ACADEMIES

During the winter, groups of students studying in pre-military academies visited the Shem Olam Visitor Center in the context of leadership training seminars ahead of their army service. Additional visits are planned for the summer.

2

2

JEWISH NATIONAL FUND CHAIRMAN AVRAHAM DUVDEVANI VISITS SHEM OLAM WITH HIS ASSISTANTS

In the company of his assistants, Moshe Freizler, Tzviki Bar Hai, and Shuki Zohar, JNF Chairman Avraham Duvdevani toured the Shem Olam Visitor Center. Shem Olam Founder and Director Rabbi Avraham Krygier conducted the special tour, and even surprised Mr. Duvdevani with information about his father.

3

3

PARTICIPANTS IN THE EIGHTH COHORT OF THE TOUR GUIDE TRAINING COURSE PARTICIPATE IN A HANDS-ON TRIP TO POLAND

A group of Chareidi young women who participated in Shem Olam's Tour Guide Training Course, conducted a week-and-a-half tour throughout Poland, under the direction of course instructors Rabbi Avraham Krygier, Rabbi Moshe Haba, and Mrs. Orit Hermon. Over the course of the trip, course participants delivered presentations at a variety of different sites and locations throughout Poland, and learned about certain places that are especially significant to the Chareidi community, including: the town of Stryków, the grave of Rabbi Fischel of Stryków, the town of Gur, and the study hall and burial place of the Chidushei Harim and the Sefat Emet, a site that has been closed in recent years. Participants walked in the footsteps of acclaimed educators Sarah Schenirer and Alter Kurzman, also known as "The Chareidi Janusz Korczak", inspired by their stories and legacies. Several months after the trip, Shem Olam conducted an evening for the families of participants, to mark the end of their training.

4

4

OT OLAM – A SEFER TORAH PROJECT TO COMMEMORATE THE 80TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE DEPORTATION OF 20,000 CHILDREN FROM THE LODZ GHETTO

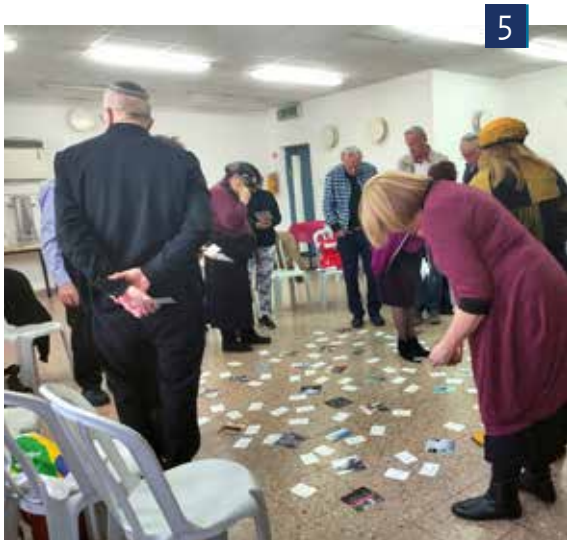
In September 1942, 20,000 children from the Lodz Ghetto were sent to their deaths in the Chelmo extermination camp in the context of the infamous "Children's Roundup", one of the most horrific events in the Holocaust. Shem Olam aspired to honor the children who were killed by writing a Sefer Torah in their memory. This Sefer Torah will be used by delegations who travel to Europe to visit different Holocaust sites and memorialize the children of the Lodz ghetto as well as all the children who were killed in the Holocaust. Additionally, Shem Olam initiated a trip to Lodz with Mrs. Esther Ornbach, whose brothers were sent to their deaths in Chelmo during the 1942 roundup. She walked through different places in the ghetto that are connected to her personal family history, and the emotional visit was recorded. At Chelmo, in the very place where these Jewish children were killed, we wrote several letters in the Sefer Torah.

Shem Olam is in the final stages of this meaningful project. We invite you to join us in writing the final words and verses in the unfinished Sefer Torah. For more information and donations, please call: 052-470-0906.

5

THE NINTH COHORT BEGINS SHEM OLAM'S "SECOND GENERATION" COURSE

The "Second Generation" course trains children of Holocaust survivors to carry the torch forward and teach the story and legacy of survivors who are no longer with us to the next generation. The ninth cohort of this program began their studies recently, in the central region of the country. In the future, program graduates will be integrated into different educational and communal frameworks where they will raise public awareness of the survivors' stories.



5

6

BOOK LAUNCH EVENT FOR YESHAYAHU FOYER'S NEW BOOK "I AM SHA'IK. PARTISAN?"

Shem Olam recently hosted a book launch event, which coincided with Sha'ik's 90th birthday. The book is geared toward a young audience and uses modern and contemporary language to describe a child who became a partisan. At the event, the book's protagonist and members of his family addressed the crowd. Rabbi Krygier delivered a talk entitled "The Difference Between Groups of Partisan Fighters and Groups of Partisan Families". The evening concluded with an address by the book's author, Mrs. Naomi Morgenstern, who discussed additional elements of this unusual phenomenon that were not included in the book.

6


7

7

AWARD OF DISTINCTION GIVEN TO THE KING OF MOROCCO

The king of Morocco was given an award of distinction in recognition of his activity against Holocaust denial and a letter of distinction and appreciation in recognition of the Moroccan king's status as a righteous gentile, via the Moroccan ambassador, Mr. Abderrahim Beyyoudh, and Dr. Abed Alohab Alali, a senior official in the Moroccan Embassy. The event was organized by The Center for Research for Moroccan Jewry, under the direction of Rabbi Shlomo Miara, in conjunction with Shem Olam, and attended by several great Moroccan rabbis, including: Rabbi Eliyahu Abergel, the head of the rabbinical court in Jerusalem, Rabbi Yitzchak Peretz of Raanana, and Rabbi Abuchatzeira from Yavne. These rabbis expressed the gratitude of the rabbinic establishment, alongside public figures such as former minister Amir Peretz, former minister Meir Shitreet, and Zion Amir, a well-known lawyer. The event was conducted in the presence of Holocaust survivors who signed the letter of distinction and appreciation. Many of the people who addressed the conference expressed their frustration that they were not able to properly express their gratitude to the kings of Morocco for years, and they felt fortunate that it was finally possible to publicly thank them for helping Jews during the Holocaust. The current king of Morocco, King Muhmad the Sixth, received an award of distinction on account of his work in preserving the legacy of the Holocaust among the next generation and fighting anti-Semitism in Morocco.

8

THE NINTH COHORT OF "DELEGATES ON THE FRONT LINES – CHILDREN OF SURVIVORS INCULCATE THE LEGACY OF THE HOLOCAUST" COMPLETED THEIR COURSE OF STUDY

Participants in the course joined the ranks of other graduates of different Shem Olam programs. Some course participants have already begun to volunteer in the context of different Shem Olam initiatives, driven to share their message with the next generation and committed to raising the public's awareness of different issues that relate to the Holocaust.


8

The Last Line of DEFENSE

By Rabbi Avraham Krygier

Recent events have brought us face to face with the satanic barbarism and unmitigated evil of some elements of Arab society and Islamic fundamentalism and thrust us back in time to distant Jewish history. From the sight of a young boy humiliated, beaten, and abducted to Gaza, to an elderly woman from Sderot being led through the streets of Gaza as objects are flung in her direction, to a mother carrying her children in her arms, surrounded by a group of monsters who have lost all semblance of humanity; monsters who chased and beheaded defenseless people and unarmed citizens.

These people exploited our inborn wholesomeness and deep faith in humanity, while we allowed them to transfer building materials, heavy equipment, and money to support their terror infrastructure and arm themselves for years. Intoxicated by misguided humanism, we turned a blind eye even when these murderers brought in armed forces and military advisors. We emptied the Gaza Strip of its Jewish residents and placed our trust in people whom, as everyone now clearly understands, never really belonged to the human race.

As a Holocaust researcher who teaches the next generation about the legacy of the Holocaust, recent events have prompted many difficult and scathing analogies. Is the picture of a rabbi carried on a wagon of sorts holding a sign that disparages Judaism, as he is mocked and belittled by vile Germans, different than what we have witnessed recently? Are the pictures of innocent children with their hands raised, or wallowing in the dirt, unlike the recent images we have encountered? Are the elderly and sick people shot to death in their beds during the Holocaust dissimilar from what we have seen today? Are the images from the distant past all that different from what we have seen in the State of Israel, which is, in theory, a sovereign state?

Is there an intrinsic difference between the atrocities described by our rabbis in the aftermath of the destruction of the Temple and recent events? Is the horrific abuse and murder of countless boys and girls by the Roman legions any different than the murderous rampage of Simchat Torah? Are recent atrocities simply a direct continuation of the persecution and cruelty directed against the Jewish community in Morocco by Heraclius in the first century, or the acts of barbarism perpetrated by the Almohad Caliphate against the Jews of the Maghreb and Spain in the twelfth century, or the cruelty of the Crusades, or the Inquisition, or Khmelnytsky, or the untold number of pogroms until the Holocaust?!

Are these just purposeless acts of hatred in which we are the objects of hate, or does something more fundamental stand behind it?

Throughout history, the Jewish people have functioned as humanity's last line of defense against itself, a spiritual barrier, and unfortunately also a physical barrier, against humanity's latent satanism and evil.

Mankind knows how to elevate itself and transform itself into the pinnacle of creation. And yet, at the same time and in the same way, there are those who exist at the bottom of the abyss of barbarism, whose brutality and malice have become their spiritual, emotional, and functional sanctuary.

From the dawn of Jewish history, our ancestors have been confronted by the children of Ismael and Amalek, nations and kings who prized themselves on the sword and deceit, on corruption and theft.

The Jewish people serve as a constant spiritual, emotional, and practical reminder, signaling to the rest of the world how far humanity can deteriorate and fall.

The ability of the Jewish people to serve in this role derives from its deep connection to morality and Jewish identity and an acute understanding and awareness of its destiny. We cannot escape the statistics – which function as another important mechanism – when Jews have

doubted their destiny and taken steps to blur their identity and obscure those things that make them distinct from the rest of humanity, when they have failed to sense, and convey to others, that they are God's 'treasured nation' (which is an obligation, as opposed to a privilege), they were immediately attacked, full force, by the lowest of the low.

This fact – this mechanism – can be detected by all the historical events mentioned above, alongside many other points in history. In the days that preceded the Holocaust, some elements of our nation believed they could assimilate and blur their Jewish identities. People would say: "Be a Jew at home, and a German when you leave" and identify as "half Pole, half Jew", among other things.

Some believed that exposure to the cultures that surrounded them was a correct and valuable step, and they therefore abandoned their own culture. I don't mean to insinuate, God forbid, that the Holocaust or the pogroms and tragic events of the past were a punishment, but there is a formula, or a modus operandi, of sorts: When we fail to serve as a bulwark, we forfeit our uniqueness, and by default, we almost forfeit our right to exist. We need to be aware that when we fail to fulfill our destiny, the rest of humanity instinctively senses something of the secret of our existence and understands that nothing stands in the way of completely obliterating our nation. From their perspective, once we have stepped away from our destiny, all that remains are the defects and flaws that anti-Semites have always attributed to the Jewish people.

For this reason, Julian Tuwim, a famous Polish poet known for his public courage, according to Holocaust researcher Professor Israel Guttman, returned to the Jewish collective in a cultural and emotional sense when faced with the shock of annihilation. Despite the fact that he was culturally and emotionally disconnected from Judaism prior to the Holocaust, he reconnected to his heritage and composed the important work, "We Are the Jews of Poland".

In a similar sense, Soviet poet Yevgeny Yevtushenko who authored the work "Babi Yar" when he learned about the horrific brutality of that time period, began to self-identify as a Jew, even though he wasn't actually Jewish. By identifying himself in this way, he sought to join the global "bulwark" that defends humanity in its entirety; a bulwark that is the domain of the Jewish people.

Does the evil savagery perpetrated by Arab murderers in recent times belong to the constant barbarism that we have almost become accustomed to in certain regions of our country? Is it just one of those behaviors that we tried to explain away for years with "logical explanations", much like the Jews of Poland explained away German cruelty in Germany, and the Jews of Hungary proposed logical explanations for German cruelty in other regions?

Or perhaps current events are simply a reminder that we do not have the possibility of denying our identity, our destiny, and our existence as the Jewish people? Is it mere coincidence that this terribly painful reminder surfaced specifically when there were misguided points of view that bombastically supported integration, prized 'pluralistic' values, and galvanized the masses to abandon Jewish destiny and ethics? Is it possible that this same formula – a mechanism as old as time itself – has returned and presented itself once again?

At this point in time, as we fight those lowly Arab murderers, is it enough to simply use our military might? Is it enough to engage in battle and squash the enemy, without staring down evil? Or perhaps, the time has also come for us to engage in spiritual soul-searching? Perhaps the time has come for us to look ourselves straight in the eye and see if we can still sense our destiny, recognize our identity, and engage the memory of being a 'treasured nation'? Or, God forbid, have our Jewish identity and destiny become blurred beyond recognition?

The Jewish people serve as a constant spiritual, emotional, and practical reminder, signaling to the rest of the world how far humanity can deteriorate and fall.

A Stirring Song of FAITH

RELIGIOUS LIFE AND RABBINIC LEADERSHIP IN THE LODZ GHETTO

By Rabbi Avraham Krygier

During the Holocaust, the ongoing existence of religious life was an important part of the fabric of daily life as well as a valuable coping mechanism. The fact that people sought to preserve and uphold religious life under these adverse conditions serves as a deep expression of their determination and struggle to maintain their Jewish identity alongside their human identity, even as they fought to survive. Inevitably, the fight for survival creates an "emotional and spiritual centrifuge" that sucks man's spirit to the very depths of despair. This centrifugal existence deprives man of his emotional faculties and all other aspects of his personality, making it nearly impossible for him to take initiative or live life to the fullest. For this reason, any and every struggle with an ethical, spiritual, or cultural element necessarily expresses a struggle for strength that bespeaks spiritual eminence and demands emotional resilience in an impossible situation, both as a community and as individuals. This is especially true with regard to the existence of religious life under these circumstances, since by definition religious life demands of a person to grapple with questions of faith, wrestle with philosophical issues, and continue to hope, even when the routines of daily life have been suspended indefinitely demanding of them to create new patterns of religious life and suitable alternatives to traditional religious practice and worship.

The fact that this world is not often mentioned in Holocaust literature or in testimonies of survivors or victims has led many to the mistaken conclusion that it simply did not exist. Nothing could be further from the truth. In reality, what changed was the barometer for assessing this world. The standard gauges that ordinarily define the "religiously observant person" (for example: Shabbat observance, hair covering, attending prayer services, mitzvah observance), became irrelevant during the Holocaust. For many of those who continued to define themselves as observant believing Jews, external symbols of observance and organized religious activities and worship, alongside baseline religious practices such as Shabbat observance, eating kosher, and wearing tzitzit, became entirely impossible from one moment to the next. Evidence of this is underscored by countless testimonies given by survivors.

That said, many members of the community were able to continue to observe mitzvot, largely in private, in their own domain, in a manner that could not easily be detected by others. Some clung to a certain genre of mitzvot, such as prayer and tefillin and the like, though the extent of their observance was necessarily limited. Others were adamant about observing particular mitzvot or tried to partially or symbolically observe mitzvot like Shabbat, Pesach, or eating kosher, despite the volatile circumstances.

There was also an extensive sublayer of the population who experienced faith and religious devotion internally, within their souls. These internal feelings were not expressed through a specific behavior pattern. Instead, these feelings were made manifest sporadically, often on key occasions such as holidays and gatherings, among other points in time. The range of circumstances and conditions in which Jews subsisted is reflected by the wide scope of religious activities and acts of mitzvah observance they engaged in. In the coming pages, we will present this range through a few examples from the Lodz Ghetto – the second-largest ghetto in Poland and the ghetto that existed for the longest stretch of time.

FOUR TIME PERIODS AND TWO GROUPS

Similar to life in the ghetto in general, the existence of religious life in the ghetto can be divided into four primary time periods within the community:

1940 – Adapting to life in the ghetto and understanding their new reality in light of the extreme restrictions placed upon them.

1941 - the beginning of 1942 – A year marked by a sharp decline in living conditions (hunger and disease), the struggle to survive, and overall emotional deterioration.

1942 – the beginning of 1943 – Decrees and deportations, tremendous insecurity about what the next day would bring, hunger, harsh decrees and restrictions imposed by the Judenrat that impacted all areas of life.

1943 – the liquidation of the ghetto in June-August 1944 – Somewhat of a reprieve in living conditions, feelings of hopelessness and disconnect, with most ghetto residents falling on the younger side of the spectrum. At the end of this period, almost all the ghetto's survivors were deported to Auschwitz.

When it comes to religious and spiritual leadership in the ghetto the division is somewhat different, since in the final months of 1942 most of the chain of leadership was sent to their deaths. For this reason, this is a more accurate division as far as the religious leadership is concerned:

1940 – mid-1941 – The ghetto has official rabbinic leadership, alongside unofficial leadership. Both are focused on the attempt to maintain religious life without conducting conspicuous activities.

Mid-1941 – the final months of 1942 – The official rabbinic leadership, and primarily the unofficial leadership become extremely active, to the point that they are engaged in confrontations with the head of the Judenrat, Chaim Mordechai Rumkowski.

1943 – Very few members of the leadership remain alive, and the unofficial leadership operates in small settings.

This article, which is perhaps the first paper to shed light on religious life in the Lodz Ghetto, has been adapted from my doctoral thesis about the Lodz rabbinate from its inception in the nineteenth century. The article is limited to a discussion of communal conduct, and even in this area, our discussion is extremely limited, given that it addresses only the first two time periods mentioned above. It does not include additional sources that go beyond and allow a glimpse into the activities of groups or individuals within the community with regard to mikvah, circumcision ceremonies, marriages, eating kosher, or religious awakening. These things form an independent category insofar as they involve collaboration between the rabbinic leadership and the ghetto community.

In the first and second periods, which as noted above span the years 1940-1941, the religious community in the ghetto that self-defined as religious, Haredi, or traditional until the outbreak of the war, could be divided into two distinct groups (this division does not include the rabbinic leadership):

The first group was an especially large population that had lost contact with the chasidic sects or the communal and political groups they had belonged to in the past. This loss of contact was manifest in the loss of their personal connection with the religious leadership. As individuals and families though, this group still tried to maintain their religious lifestyle, at least to some extent. This is demonstrated by the story of my father, Yaakov Krygier, who lived in the ghetto with his family:

> The third day of the war...my older brother who had a family [of his own] came running in, frightened, and scared: What should we do...go outside and look what's going on... [the streets] were full of residents...they looked like they were planning to escape, but where to – nobody had yet decided...My brother asked me, as if he was asking himself: What should we do, Yaakov?... My gaze fell on the second side of the street, I saw a regal looking Jew, apparently a rebbe I didn't recognize, with his attendant, harried and agitated...I presented my older brother's question to him...the rebbe lifted his eyes to heaven and said "Where can I flee from Your presence" and continued on his way. I conveyed the rebbe's words to my brother and he decided to stay in Lodz.[1]

This description reflects a well-known phenomenon in the pre-Holocaust world: In times of doubt and uncertainty, the believing Jew turns to a rabbi, a rebbe, or a religious figure, for guidance and advice. That was how my father conducted himself in the early days, and his brother also followed the rebbe's implicit suggestion. Yet, in his detailed description of the ensuing months and years that he spent in the Lodz Ghetto, my father does not mention this phenomenon even once. Certainly this isn't just incidental. It is a reflection of his personal reality, which to my mind reflects the reality of many others.

A fascinating presentation of this reality can be found in Yosef Zalkowitz's description of the Glandiziner Rebbe, a fictitious character whom Zalkowitz uses as a literary device to portray the reality in the ghetto: "Initially, he was still able to delve into the Torah [the conceptual ideas] of the *Kedushat Levi* [the novellae of Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev]. His physical hunger was satiated somewhat

1 Yaakov Krygier, Chiyitani, Shem Olam, 5761, p. 51.

by the food provisions that his friends sent him from the property of the general government, and from the remains of the stockpiles given to him by his chasidim". He continues, using rich symbolism to describe the steady decline:

> As was customary, the rebbe's wife continued to light Shabbat candles, though not the same large candles as before...[she] rather used thin milky candles...no longer big challot for [the blessing of] "hamotzi"... and the chasidim came to the rebbe's table. Not the wealthy and established chasidim who used to come in the past...rather those who were embittered and desperate...they would also sing songs, though in sad and melancholy tunes...that was how things were in the beginning, when life in the ghetto wasn't so hard.

In the beginning, they still tried to preserve the structure that had existed previously. But the important chasidim were already far less involved, if at all. (Perhaps because they were embarrassed that they could no longer provide the assistance they had given in the past.) Even so, the rebbe still conducted a "tisch" each week. Later, even those who still associated with the rebbe and the traditional framework disengaged, and the rebbe's life became pitiful – both physically and spiritually:

> Later, when life became harsh and difficult and the soul froze and shriveled within the body, the chasidim forgot their rebbe...the rebbe conducted Shabbat alone. The songs and hymns he sung were no longer songs, they were rather cries...when the Glandiziner [Rebbe] finished his prayers, he would turn to look at his meager table...which perhaps had two challot... meat and fish were certainly not there...his wife would go from house to house, to his former chasidim and their wives, collecting crumbs and bits of food...from these [ingredients] she would prepare paltry meals for Shabbat...the rebbe would sit wrapped in his warm tallit and tefillin, immersed in his Divine service like a simple Jew, reading psalms like a modest tailor.[2]

The reality described by Zalkowitz was double-sided: Not only does the community disengage from its leaders, but even the rebbe withdraws from his position of leadership. He becomes like one of his chasidim, a simple Jew who sits and reads psalms like a tailor. For this community, the realm of shared collective existence has ended, and the deeds and actions of individuals, far simpler and basic, take center stage. After all, if the rebbe has taken to reciting psalms like a tailor, where does that leave his former chasidim? From a spiritual perspective, what is left for them to hold on to? And yet, it is clear to Zalkowitz that many of them continue holding on to something.

Zalkowitz describes this reality through a story about a man named Yitzchak who attempts to maintain the tenderness of his soul, despite his debilitating illness (in this part of his writings, Zalkowitz describes what he knows about people's living experiences in different apartments in the ghetto): "He awoke as usual every single day, whether or not there was something to eat... first things first, Yitzchak would wrap himself in a tallit, put on tefillin, and pray...prayer was hard for him. He needed to pray sitting down, his legs refused to listen to him".[3] His physical condition notwithstanding, Yitzchak succeeds in making prayer an important part of his daily schedule.

In his description of Yaakov Eliyahu, Zalkowitz emphasizes observance of a different nature: "He announced once and for all: 'I won't take food from the communal kitchen. I have no way of knowing what the kashrut standards are. Indeed, he didn't take, and he didn't eat...later, he reluctantly allowed the women to take soup from the [communal] kitchen, provided that they used their own utensils".[4] Yaakov Eliyahu synthesizes his personal absolute standards of observance, that he views as a protective shield that prevents the loss of his overall spirit and being, with the practical considerations mandated by an honest assessment of the situation: The other members of the household need to eat food that is most likely not kosher because it is a matter of life and death. With that, Yaakov Eliyahu's personal code of conduct will function as a symbol of their faith and internal belief system, which remain entirely intact.

Pinchas Winderbaum notes that for the first six months he and his family stayed at home and prayed at home. His father's connection to the chasidic group he was affiliated with dissolved. Only on Rosh Hashanah 5701 (1941), when communal prayer services were permitted again, via the ostentatious prayer service conducted by the Germans together with the Judenrat and Rumkowski in the local movie theatre, did certain groups begin to gather together again.[5]

Yeshayahu Trunk explains that during the first period, when prayer services and communal gatherings were outlawed, many people would stand next to machines in the ghetto's factories, wrapped in a tallit, especially on Shabbat and holidays. Others would pray on their own in the privacy of their homes. Still others would gather in small groups in specific apartments and conduct prayer services behind locked doors or in attics. Though it's obvious that these small groups operated spontaneously, the members of these groups provided assistance to fellow members in dire straits and tried to supply them with some potatoes or vegetables.[6]

2 Yosef Zalkowitz, B'yamim Ha'noraim Ha'hem, Yad Vashem, 5755, pp. 70–77.
3 Ibid, p. 94.
4 Ibid, p. 136.
5 The testimony of Pinchas Winderbaum, Yad Vashem, Division O.33.
6 Yeshayahu Trunk, Lodzer Ghetto, 1962, p. 404.

MEZUZOT, BREAD, AND A PAGE OF TALMUD

The second group attempted to continue to gather together and maintain its religious and communal bonds, even though in a broader sense the community was predisposed to being counted among the first group. In general, the second group was different than the first insofar as they gathered in designated prayer venues and maintained the sense of community that had defined them in the past. At the same time, these communities worked to create new communal frameworks on account of the reality they faced, despite the inherent danger.

Consider the following excellent example: A group of Rav Avraham Yitzchak Hakohen Kook's followers (a group that operated in Poland in the 1930's and didn't disband with Rav Kook's death in 1935), continued to function as a group and pray in the "Beit Tefilah – Beit Avraham" synagogue at 38 Zagiroska Street. Four months after they entered the ghetto, they invited Rumkowski to visit their community, ahead of the rapidly approaching holiday of Rosh Hashanah.[7] This group saw themselves as the continuation of the Mizrachi and Torah V'avodah movements of Lodz. During the initial period in the ghetto, this community continued to function as a center of religious activity; we do not have any evidence about its existence in the years that followed.

The official prayer service conducted on Rosh Hashanah 5701 (1941) paved the way for other public prayer services on the High Holidays that year. In the Shem Olam archive, there are many advertisements and notices about these prayer services, such as the central prayer service conducted by Chazzan Leib Roskin and his choir at 31 Franciszkanska Street. In order to participate in this service, worshippers needed to reserve seats and pay ahead of time.[8] As early as September 13th that year Rumkowski announced that it was possible to open "places of worship" as long as the exact address was submitted in advance, the stated venue abided by sanitary standards, and all worshippers preregistered.[9] The different communities did not respond to this announcement immediately since they were apprehensive about the implications of registering their congregants.

Yeshayahu Trunk quotes Shlomo Frankel, who discusses the steady, organized activity of teen boys, who "continued to devote themselves to learning Shas day and night, in a building in an apartment on the third floor, at 42 Kalma Street. The group was most active at night, when their learning would not be disturbed". He also mentions that in the Marysin area, where the religious colonies of the ghetto were located, there was a synagogue that was open to all, and the youth would gather there to study Talmud and 'daf yomi'.[10]

Groups like these and others continued to function as frameworks for Torah study. Most participants knew each other from before the war. Based on the Encyclopedia of the Lodz Ghetto, a compilation written collaboratively by many residents of the ghetto and completed in 1944, we can learn how the community organized itself during the initial period in the ghetto. Many groups were linked to the official bodies that had operated before the war and mirrored the way they had functioned until that point in time. For example, the "Bnei Chorev" organization, established by Shlomo Dan Siyavash, was essentially a continuation of "Chorev", a religious-spiritual society active in prewar Lodz. This organization had dozens of members and was active until the very end of the Lodz Ghetto.

> They opened a Talmud Torah and conducted vigorous activities to promote the observance of Shabbat among religious workers...or when someone was bullied for observing Shabbat...they [the organization] worked to teach orphan children "kaddish". They would take them to prayer services and ensure that they recited "kaddish" in memory of their parents...when the parochial schools [Talmud Torahs] were officially shut down, the members of "Bnei Chorev" went to people's houses and taught the children in their own homes... every Friday night, they would organize a communal Shabbat meal [in the primary source it's referred to as a "tisch"] where the children would sing Shabbat songs... and talk about timely matters.[11]

Another body that operated in the ghetto was known as "Shem", a Hebrew acronym for the words "The Mezuzot Observers". The organization began as the solo initiative of Rabbi Avraham Meshingiser: "Since the ghetto is only inhabited by Jews, it is necessary to place mezuzot on all of the ghetto's buildings, apartments, and gates". This group operated under trying conditions and the Gestapo and local Jewish police force harassed them and made it very difficult for them to perform their work. The "Shem" activists though were undeterred. To the contrary, they increased their activities and organized extensive "PR" efforts to support their initiative in the streets and at prayer services throughout the ghetto. They linked the Jews' lax attitude toward the mitzvot of mezuzah and tzitzit with the Germans' order to wear yellow stars. From their perspective, the yellow star that sought to shame and disgrace the Jews was a punishment for concealing their Jewish identity, rather than proudly embracing it by placing a mezuzah on the doorposts of their homes and wearing tzitzit. This group was active from the very beginning of life in the ghetto until the death of the

7 The Shem Olam Archive, Original File LO/C4, Document 1467.
8 The Shem Olam Archive, Poster and Announcement Section, File LO/G, Document 1130.
9 Ibid, Document 956.
10 Trunk, p. 405.
11 Nachman Blumenthal, "Teudat Rabbat Erekh – B'asor L'chisul Ghetto Lodz – Encyclopedia of the Lodz Ghetto", Yediot Beit Lochamei Haghettaot, Booklet 7 (November 1954), p. 15.

group's founder in the second half of 1942. It seems that the society was comprised of several volunteer scribes who wrote mezuzot. Beyond the scribes, the group also had dozens of volunteers who went around and spread the word and encouraged people to affix mezuzot to the gates of their buildings and the doorposts of their homes.[12]

A religious society known as "V'ahavta L'reiacha Kamokha" [Love your fellow as yourself], which had been active in the township of Wiszniva-Gora, began to operate in the Lodz Ghetto after its founder, Rabbi Baruch Gelbert, entered the ghetto shortly after it was established. Rabbi Gelbert "organized a large number of members who gave monthly donations", in addition to money raised from the sale of bread, when it was still available for purchase in the open market (until the end of 1940).

> They would buy bread and set up breakfast in a room... any resident of the ghetto was welcome to come in and get bread and coffee for breakfast. People who could, paid, people who couldn't afford it – received breakfast for free. This society placed utmost importance not only on providing the hungry with food, which prompted them to collect money from donors, but also the practice of washing hands before eating and reciting Birkhat Hamazon when they were finished.
>
> Gelbert brought hungry children there, even after it was no longer possible to purchase bread in the free market. At this point in time, the group continued to operate by gathering food from ghetto authorities for people who did not receive food anywhere else. They also provide sleeping accommodations for Jews who came to the ghetto from outlying cities. At the end of 1941, the society began to spread Torah. They established several groups known as the "Diligent Daf Yom Learners", who conducted Torah study in the courtyards.[13]

This source reveals a lot of information about a group that operated within the ghetto on several different planes, without being affiliated with the Judenrat at all. This was highly unusual in the Lodz Ghetto, in light of the way that Rumkowski managed things, and his deep concern about any type of organized activity that might one day undermine him. This group changed its goals in light of the changing reality in the ghetto and the changing needs of the people. It was an organized communal arm, united by religious goals, that operated for almost three years, from the ghetto's earliest days. This group was neither focused on providing for its constituents nor maintaining frameworks that had operated in the past. Instead, it sought to address needs that had cropped up within the community and directed its operations toward the community at large. In fact, on occasion, the people who benefited from its services were individuals who were not at all connected to the group.

CHASIDIM AND YOUTH GROUPS

Both chasidic groups and youth movements that had operated in the past continued their activities in the initial period in the ghetto. These groups adapted as necessary and even became aggressive about issues they felt needed to be prioritized and addressed. Gerrer Chasidim formed the largest clearly defined sect in prewar Lodz, with dozens of shteibels scattered throughout the city. Upon entering the ghetto, the Gerrer Chasidim limited their activities to one central shteibel located at 15 Marynarska Street, and formed a representative body known as "The Committee of Gerrer Chasidim of the Lodz Ghetto".

The existence of this committee is verified by several documents, most significantly a letter written to Rumkowski in which the authors begin by thanking him for helping them procure the four species for Succot 5701 (October 1941). The document sheds light on the religious activities that the committee took upon itself. The authors of the letter list the issues that are most important to them, including the ability for their constituents to conduct their lives in accordance with religious strictures, especially with regard to educational issues, Shabbat observance, and kosher food. It is clear that the committee feels responsible for handling things internally - for the chasidic families who maintained their connection with them and united under the auspices of the committee - as well as externally, by standing up to the Judenrat or working with them on different issues, if possible.[14]

Only a few of the chasidim previously affiliated with Ger were affiliated with this committee, as demonstrated by additional documents in the Shem Olam Archive. One important document is an invitation from January 1942 - a point in time when disease and hunger were rampant in the ghetto, but the major deportations had not yet begun, as proven by the fact that organized group activities were still being held. In this document, Rumkowski is invited to visit the Gerrer shteibel on the Shabbat before the anniversary of the death of the "Sefat Emet" in honor of a special event that would be conducted. In the letter, the authors mention Rumkowski's visit to the shteibel on the previous Yom Kippur (October 1941) and note that his donation that day enabled them to help hundreds of families through a rolling loan among their member families.[15] Given that the shteibel in question was the sole house of worship for the Gerrer community, it becomes

12 Ibid, Booklet 14-15 (April 1958), p. 64.
13 Ibid, p. 68.
14 The Shem Olam Archive, Section LO-M1, Document 77.
15 The Shem Olam Archive, Section LO-M1, Document 78.

clear that this was the sum total of families active in this framework.

The Chabad chasidic community formed a similar model. They conducted prayer services and joint Torah study sessions at their headquarters at 11 Malinska Street. Naturally, this became a place where activists gathered to discuss things and make decisions about how to approach pertinent issues with Rumkowski (who had a special affinity for this chasidic group). This is established by several documents, most significantly the protocol from a meeting conducted at the headquarters that discussed different communal issues and their attitude toward Rumkowski.[16] Additionally, Chabad chasidim ran the "Tomchei Temimim" Yeshiva in the ghetto, where a committee provided students with food to eat and a place to live.[17]

There was also a group of Alexander Chasidim in the ghetto, under the leadership of Rabbi Simcha Auberbaum (a member of the rabbinical council). Despite his advanced age, Rabbi Auberbaum established a center for their sect in the ghetto and took initiative with regard to many issues, such as non-kosher meat and operating a mikvah in the ghetto. He conducted activities from a building located at 12 Yakoba Street that had previously served as a yeshiva for Alexander Chasidim. The Alexander Chasidim who kept up their relationship with the group came to pray there (there weren't many of them). From time to time, Rabbi Auberbaum would deliver speeches and sermons to encourage the people (since the rebbe himself had moved to Warsaw).[18]

Radomsker Chasidim also conducted activities for their constituency in the ghetto, though in a far more limited fashion. Their activities were organized by Rabbi Moshe Weiss, a member of the rabbinical council of the ghetto, and held at the Radmosker Shteibel and their yeshiva ketanah. Other chasidic sects also maintained their own shteibels for a time, though a relatively small number of people frequented each one. All these things represented an attempt to somehow maintain the religious and social frameworks that were rapidly declining in number. There were also some ad hoc measures, such as a request made to the Judenrat by several rabbis in Elul 5740 (1940) to use classrooms in the local school for prayer services. This too marked an attempt to try to preserve some of the fixtures of communal life from years gone by.

The drive to continue conducting organized activities as they had in the past can also be detected among groups who lived in the Marysin area of the ghetto, including the religious youth movements Hechalutz Hamizrachi, Hashomer Hadati, and Bnei Akiva. For half a year, immediately after the occupation (the end of 1939 until the beginning of 1940), these groups did not conduct any official organized activities, though individual members maintained personal relationships with one another.[19] It seems that this phenomenon was linked to a few factors. For starters, the upper leadership of all political movements had left Lodz. Beyond this, nuclear family units were shocked and distraught by the German onslaught, the deprivation, and the cessation of normative life. However, shortly before the establishment of the ghetto, key figures of all youth movements met and decided to unite as one movement, according to Shalom Cooper, signaling the imminent renewal of organized activity.[20]

Soon after the ghetto was established, the Kibbutz Society received authorization from the Judenrat to set up a pioneering commune in the Marysin region of the ghetto. The three religious youth groups joined this initiative, including 30–40 members from Hechalutz Hamizrachi and 70–100 members of Hashomer Hadati and Bnei Akiva.[21] The religious atmosphere of these groups was especially prominent. Zehava Zucker notes that the dining room also served as the synagogue. It had an aron kodesh and a cabinet for storing prayer books, chumashim, and other religious objects. Communal prayer services were conducted there every day. Members of the group were careful to wash their hands before eating and recite Birkhat Hamazon when they were done. In general, rigorous religious standards of mitzvah observance were part of the atmosphere. Cooper's grandfather was a pious chasid and he was strictly opposed to her joining a mixed group. Until one day:

> One morning, despite his advanced age, the grandfather arrived…at the Bnei Akiva kibbutz in Marysin to see how his granddaughter lived…he walked inside and looked around him angrily. But when he saw the Sefer Torah and the prayerbooks, and the boys unwrapping the straps of their tefillin, his expression changed, and he seemed to be pleased.[22]

Beyond the group's way of life day in day out, the general atmosphere and the way they kept Shabbat and holidays are noteworthy. The moment they lit candles, a festive aura enveloped the entire group. The group's prayer services and joint meal included much joyous singing and reinforced the special ambience. This environment - typical of prewar Lodz and now exceptionally rare - even generated jealousy among neighboring kibbutzim.[23] In her testimony, Mala Hacohen-Weinberg also speaks about the Torah study sessions conducted by the Bnei Akiva group and the sermons and lectures organized by Yitzchak

16 Ibid, Section LO-C2, Document 407.
17 Ibid, ibid, Document 137 – a publication of the "Tomchei Temimim" Yeshiva from October 9, 1940.
18 The testimony of Avraham Mechirovsky, Shem Olam Archive, Testimony Section (014), File 8.
19 Sarah Zalwer Auerbach, Tenuat Bnei Akiva B'ghetto Lodz B'shnot Ha'hashmada V'ha'kilyon, Moreshet, 1999, p. 38.
20 Ibid, p. 49.
21 Ibid, pp. 60–61.
22 Ibid, pp. 71–73.
23 Ibid, pp. 76–77.

Zakharish, which remained etched in her mind years later.[24]

After the kibbutzim were dismantled in January 1941 and children's homes were set up in Marysin, many of those who were active in youth movements became group leaders and workers who fulfilled other roles in the new setting. They continued to conduct a religious lifestyle in the children's home and educated their charges to observe Shabbat and holidays, which were cornerstones of the movement. They prayed, held Shabbat meals with kiddush and hamotzi, and conducted an "oneg Shabbos" where they would sing songs and tell stories about the Land of Israel.[25] The adults who did not have official roles in these homes continued to keep up their relationship with other members of the movement, though they weren't able to continue observing these mitzvot and preserving symbols of religion collectively.

In a word, this group was another entity that was able to organize itself around the dimension of religion and Zionism, even as daily life in the ghetto became constrained and limited. It should be noted that a parallel group of Agudat Yisrael activists functioned similarly in the Marysin section of the ghetto, though with a very limited number of participants.

SUMMARY

As noted, this article gives voice to only a very small part of the Lodz Ghetto period. And yet, it points to a complexity that demands of us to recognize and understand this extraordinary reality, a reality that simultaneously oscillated between two extremes. On the one hand, it was a reality fraught with shock and confusion that stemmed from the dramatic changes taking place and manifested by the total loss of all semblance of normative life before the war, both in the physical and emotional-spiritual realms.

As far as physical survival was concerned, people lost the ability to support themselves. Many were no longer able to feed themselves and even died from starvation. As far as emotional survival was concerned, the new reality disconnected them from their families and social networks. Moving to a tiny apartment and living in makeshift living quarters caused them to deteriorate further emotionally, leaving them with the feeling that they lived in a cage. Beyond all of this, was the dread of what tomorrow may bring. Deep fear about venturing outside to the public domain and exposing themselves to the dangers that lurked there was offset by the feeling that they simply couldn't live in such tight quarters. The fear about what lay in store paralyzed them, since they knew full well that the upcoming decrees may deprive them of the meager status, connections, or abilities they had managed to generate altogether.

On the other hand, precisely at this time, people began to build their emotional, spiritual, and religious worlds. Some aspects of this world were not an outgrowth of a deep thought process per say, but rather a sudden move that channeled the internal strength that rumbled within their souls. Identifying and understanding the building process inherent in the first category, which was extremely personal, enables us to detect the fragmented shards of faith and religion among some of the ghetto's residents.

The second category is comprised of new communal activities conducted within the unique conditions and circumstances that prevailed in the ghetto. This category includes both initiatives that mirrored activities conducted in the past, as well as entirely new initiatives and activities. These initiatives teach us about the way religious life, spirit and faith developed in 1940-1941. Moreover, understanding these initiatives gives us the tools, awareness and understanding that enable the reader to monitor the spiritual-religious existence in the ghetto, until the very end.

It should be noted that though these communal activities drew participants who spread ideas and transformed them from theoretical concepts to practical actions, the vast majority of the community was passive and apparently did not participate in any of these events. And yet, it is clear that the group's impact could be felt in additional circles of individuals within the ghetto. This is demonstrated by Eliezer Ziskind and Mala Hacohen-Weinberg's discussion about the wider impact of acts of religious intensity, devotion, and connection to tradition. They note that when they would pass by the home of the Zallver family on Friday nights, throughout their time in the ghetto, they saw a table covered with a white tablecloth, with Shabbat candles standing prominently on it.[26] Though this family's act of devotion belongs to the first category discussed in this article, in practice it had an impact on the wider community, making it part of the second category. It is possible that this act derived from the fact that some members of the family were active in the Bnei Akiva kibbutz in Marysin and belonged to the second category. Either way, this example points to the wider impact of an individual act and the hidden circles of influence that are created.

"More than what I have read before you is written here", the Kohen Gadol says during the Yom Kippur service (Mishna Yoma 7:1). The same is true for us as well. This article can serve as a springboard for further exploration and study and lead one to understand things more deeply.

24 Ibid, p. 79.
25 Ibid, p. 87.
26 Zallver-Auerbach, p. 103.

Many sources that were not cited here can help us understand a reality that was mostly obscured from view. Today, eighty years after the Holocaust, is a good time for us to reexamine some of these issues, with the emotional, spiritual, and religious realms figuring in prominently among them.[27]

27 This article was recently published in Hebrew in the book Sha'ali Serufa Ba'eish – Ha'shoah V'zichrona B'mabat Dati-Leumi, ed. Itamar Levi.

Bibliography

Books:

Encyclopedia of the Lodz Ghetto": "Yediot", Beit Lochamei Haghettaot, Booklet 7, 1954.

Encyclopedia of the Lodz Ghetto": "Yediot", Beit Lochamei Haghettaot, Booklet 14-15, 1958.

Yaakov Krygier, Chiyitani, Shem Olam Publications, Kfar Haroeh, 5761.

Trunk, Yeshayahu, Lodzer Ghetto, private publication, New York, 1962.

Zalkowitz, Yosef, B'yamim Ha'noraim Ha'hem, Yad Vashem, 5755.

Zalwer Auerbach, Sarah, Tenuat Bnei Akiva B'ghetto Lodz B'shnot Ha'hashmada V'ha'kilyon, Moreshet, 1999, p. 38.

Documents:

Mechirovsky, Avraham, Testimony Section, Shem Olam Document Archive, Document Section LO, files c2, c4, m1.

THE INTERNATIONAL CENTER
SHEM OLAM
CONNECTING THE NEXT GENERATION TO THE MEMORY OF THE HOLOCAUST

"SHEM OLAM" INSTITUTE
KFAR HAROEH
POSTAL CODE – 3895500

04-6301637 FAX: 04-6365929
WWW.SHEMOLAM.ORG.IL
shemolam@shemolam.org.il